

A PRESENTATION ON THE KANSAS OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND THE KANSAS OPEN RECORDS ACT

by

District Attorney Nola Tedesco Foulston and
Deputy District Attorney Ann Swegle

18th Judicial District of Kansas

www.sedgwickcounty.org/da



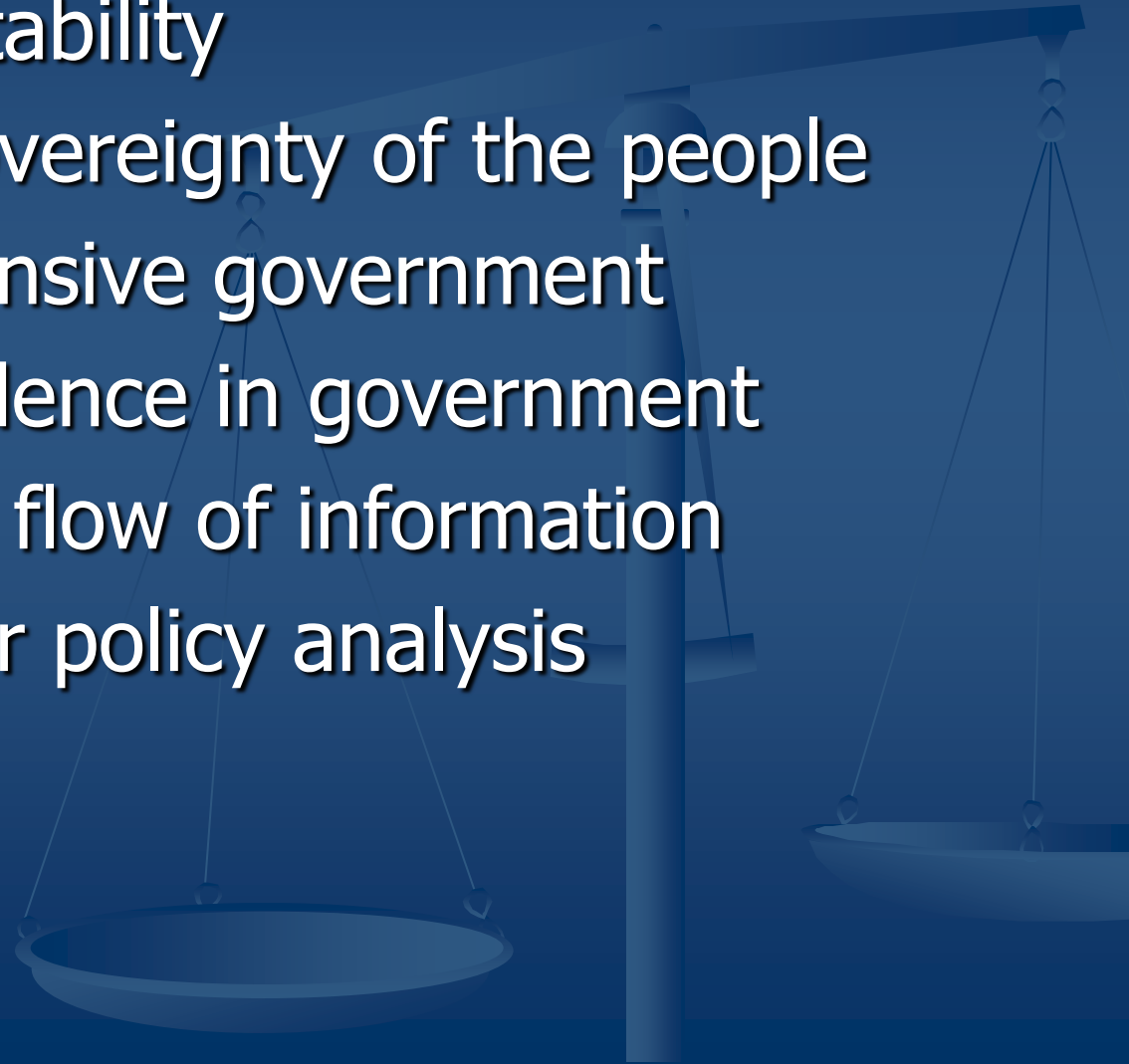
(316) 660-3600

KOMA

- Recognizing that a **representative government is dependent upon an informed electorate**, meetings for the conduct of governmental affair and the transaction of governmental business shall be open to the public
- It is specifically against public policy for meetings to be adjourned to another time or place to subvert policy of openness

KOMA

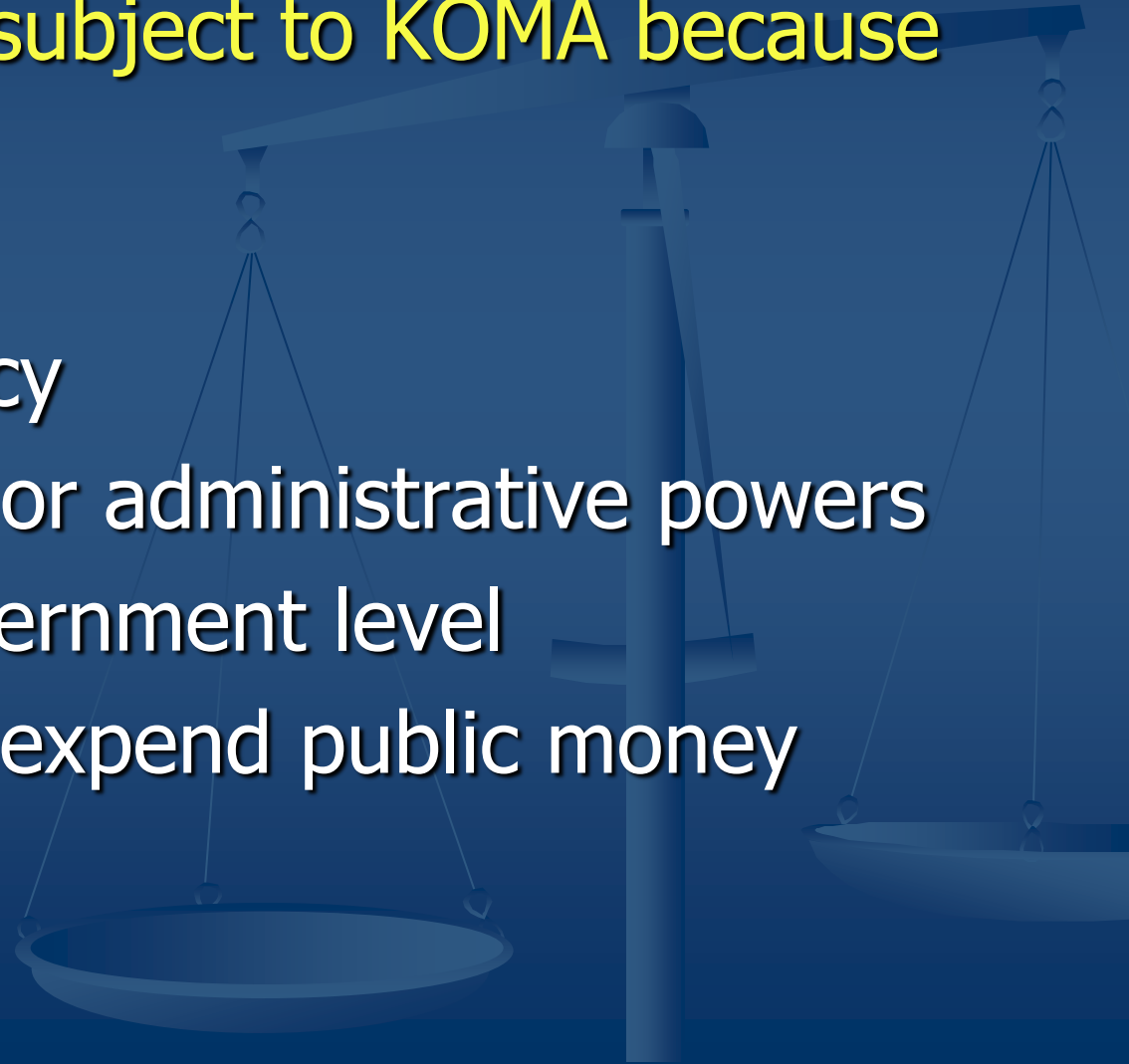
- Insures accountability
- Respects the sovereignty of the people
- Advances responsive government
- Promotes confidence in government
- Encourages the flow of information
- Allows for better policy analysis



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City Councils are subject to KOMA because they are:

- A body or agency
- With legislative or administrative powers
- At the local government level
- That receive or expend public money



KOMA

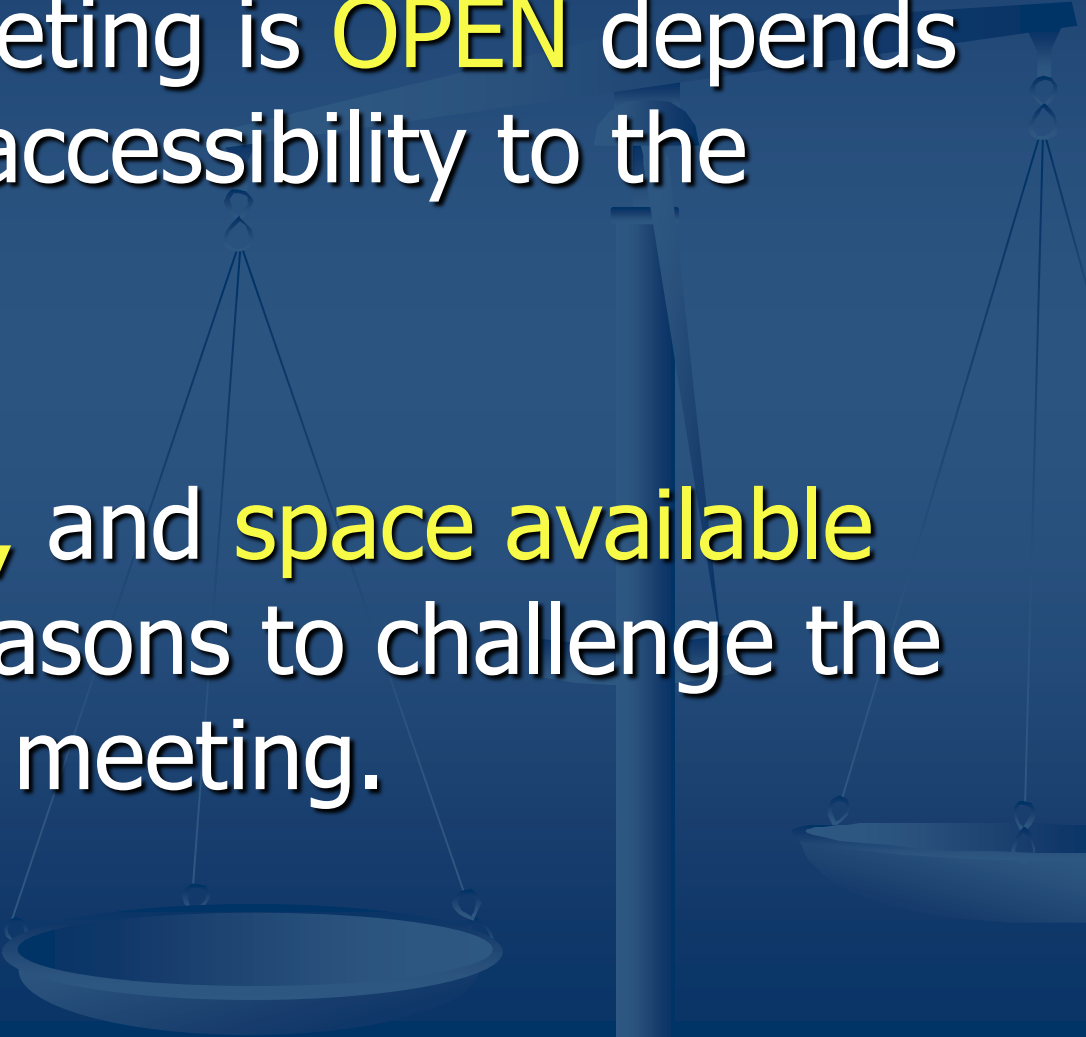
- Boards, committees, or other subordinate groups of the body are also subject to KOMA
 - Examples:
 - District Advisory Boards
 - Board of Appeals of Plumbers & Gas Fitters
- Groups need not expend public funds if supported by funds or advisory to body
- Does NOT apply to staff meetings of body

KOMA

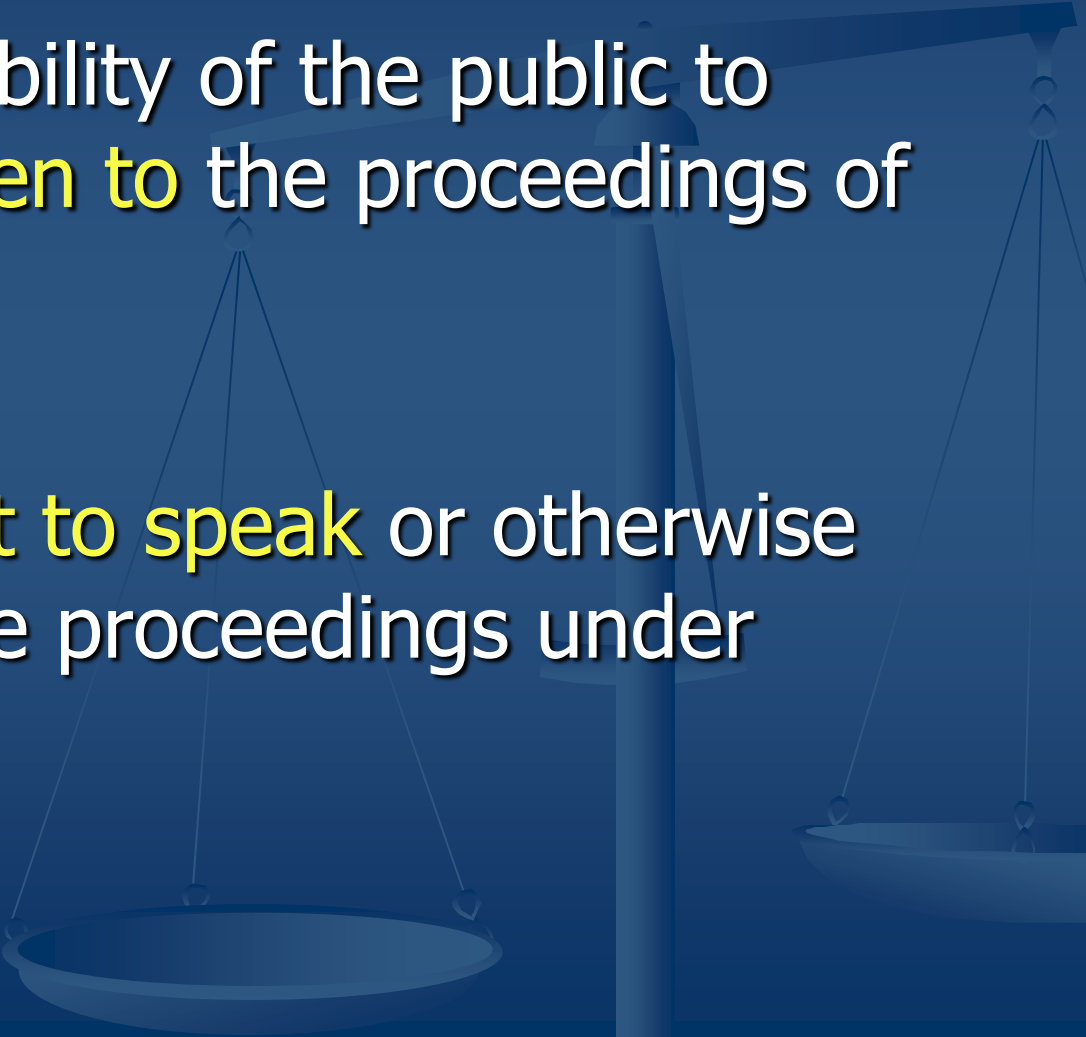
■ Exceptions:

- When an administrative body is **deliberating matters** as part of its exercise of its **quasi-judicial** function
 - Example: Deliberating a zoning appeal
- If otherwise provided by state or federal law or rule of Kansas House or Senate
- Parole board institutional hearings
- Impeachment inquiries

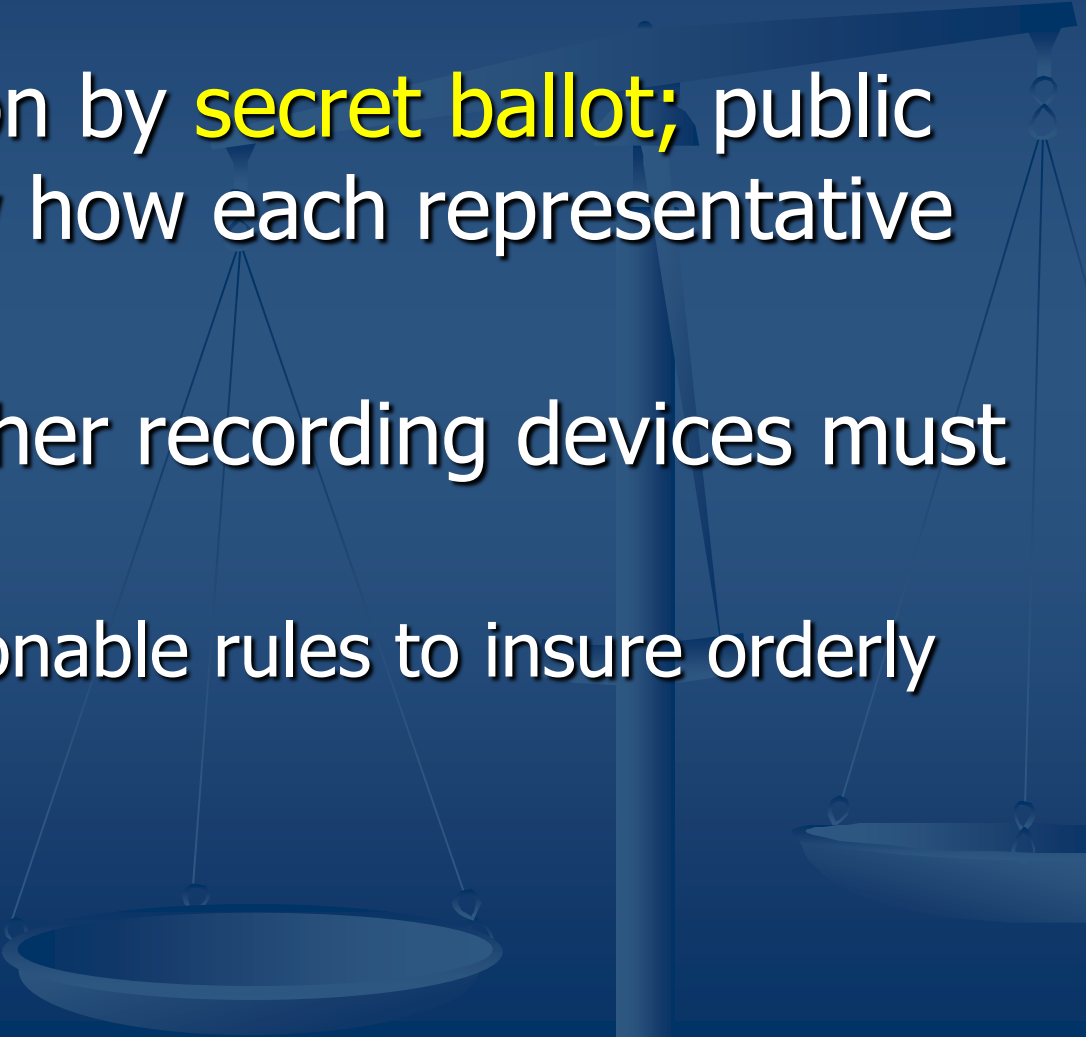
KOMA

- Whether a meeting is **OPEN** depends on the public accessibility to the meeting.
 - **Time, location, and space available** could all be reasons to challenge the openness of a meeting.
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- A faint, stylized illustration of a balance scale is visible in the background. The scale is positioned vertically, with its central pillar and two pans hanging from a horizontal beam. The pans are empty, and the scale appears to be in a state of equilibrium. The lines of the scale are thin and light blue, blending into the dark blue background.

KOMA

- The key is the ability of the public to **observe and listen to** the proceedings of the body.
 - There is **no right to speak** or otherwise participate in the proceedings under KOMA.
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- A faint, stylized illustration of a balance scale is visible in the background. It features a central vertical pillar with two pans hanging from a horizontal beam. The scale is positioned on the right side of the slide, with its pans extending towards the center.

KOMA

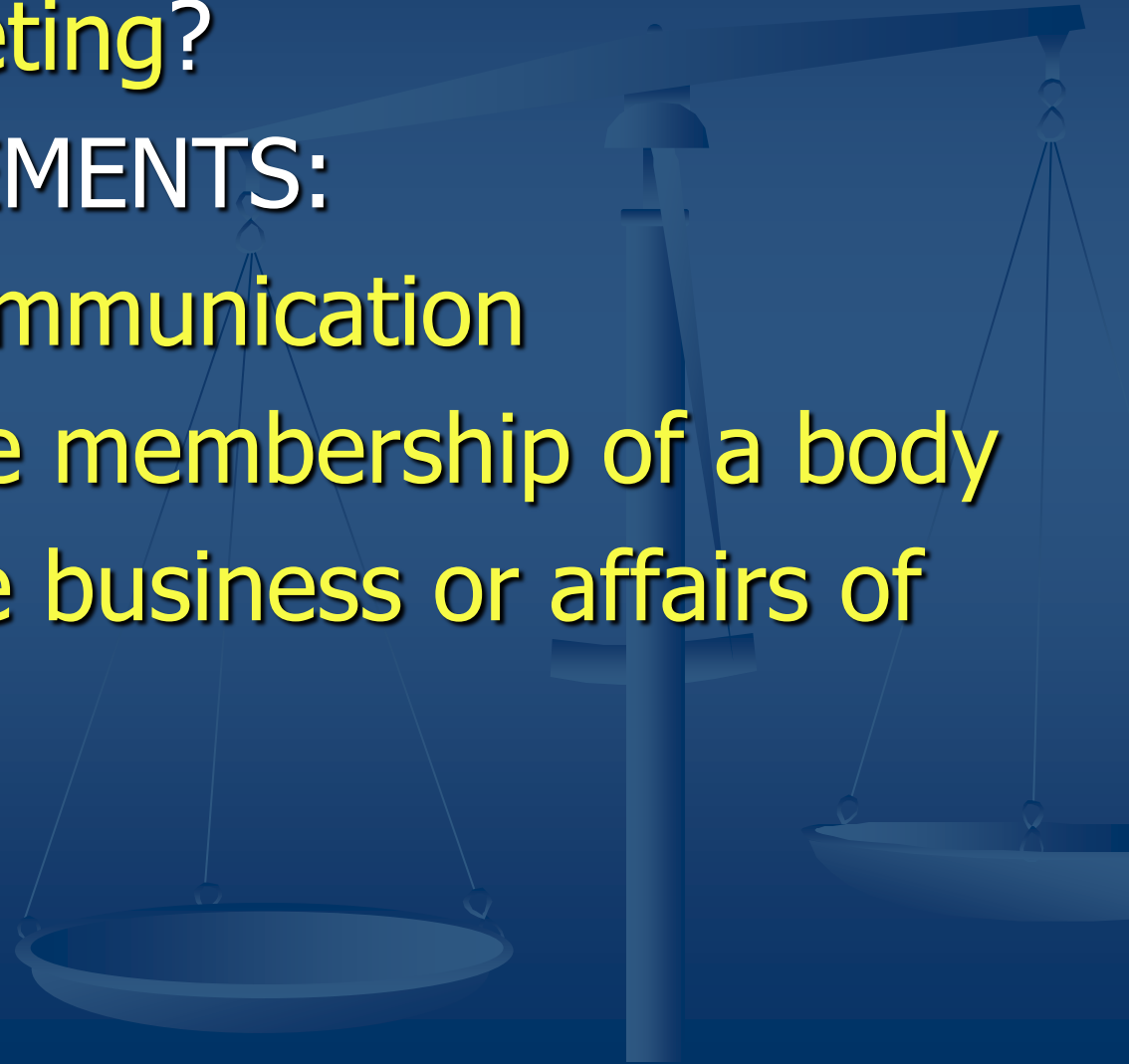
- No binding action by **secret ballot**; public entitled to know how each representative voted
 - Cameras and other recording devices must be allowed
 - Subject to reasonable rules to insure orderly proceedings
- 
- A faint, stylized illustration of a balance scale is visible in the background. The scale is positioned on the right side of the slide, with its vertical pillar and horizontal beam extending across the upper right portion. Two pans are suspended from the beam by thin lines, hanging down towards the bottom of the frame. The entire image has a dark blue background.

KOMA

- What is a Meeting?

THREE KEY ELEMENTS:

- Interactive communication
- Majority of the membership of a body
- Discussing the business or affairs of the body



KOMA

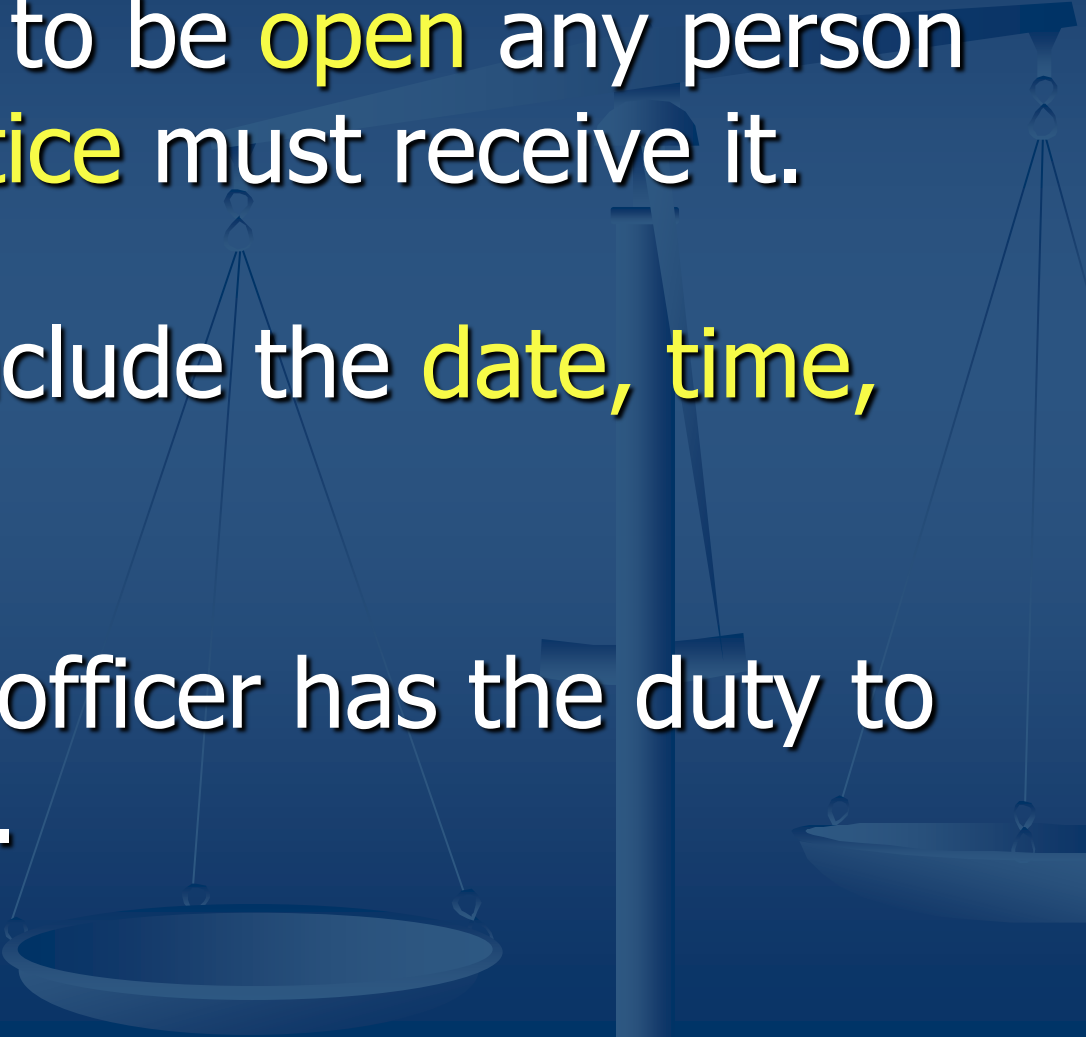
■ Interactive Communications

- In-person gatherings, telephone calls, emails, text messages, other methods of communication
- Polling of members by third parties
- No prearrangement requirement

KOMA

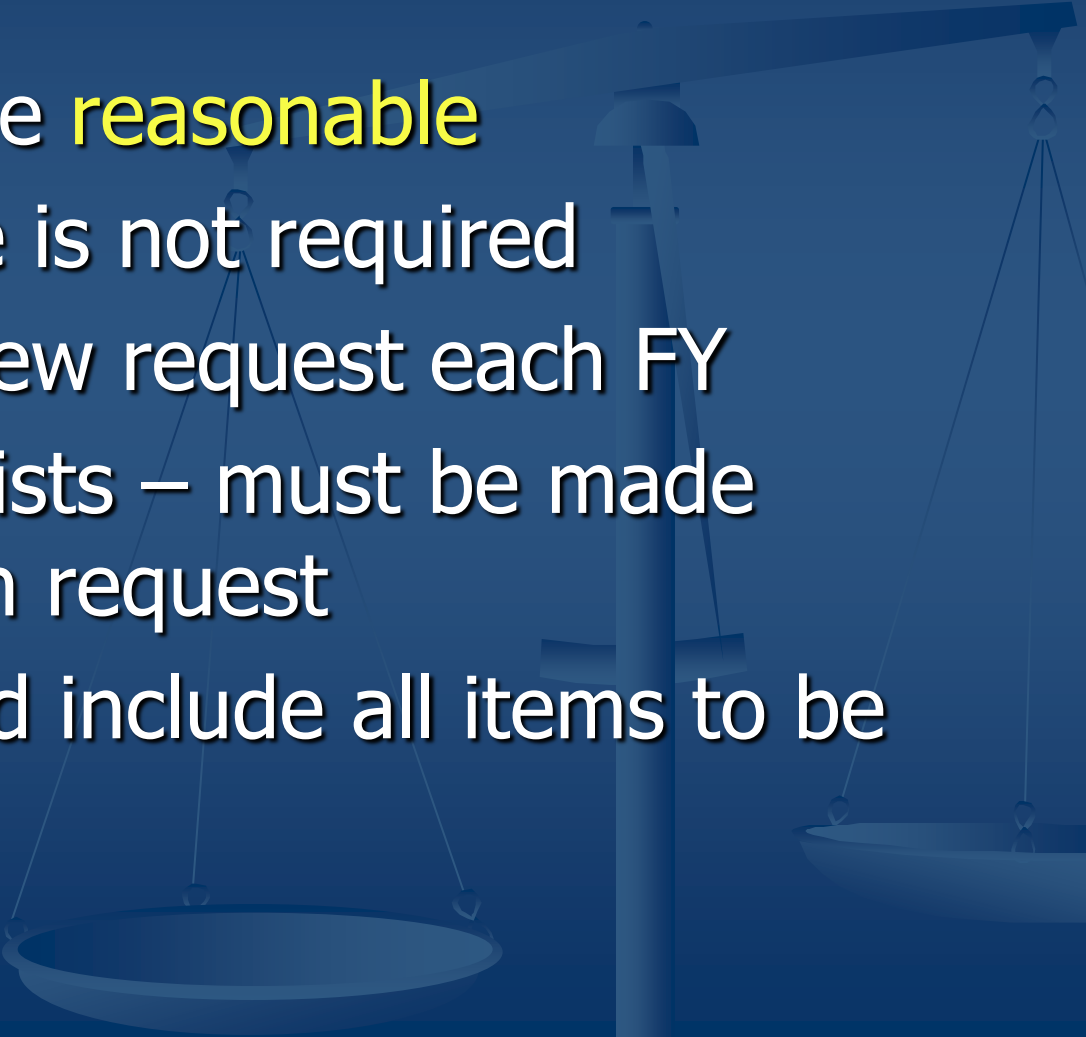
- Serial interactive communications are OPEN if they collectively:
 - Involve a **majority of the membership**
 - Share a **common topic** concerning the business or affairs of the body, and
 - Intended by any or all participants to **REACH AGREEMENT** on a matter that requires binding action

KOMA

- For a meeting to be **open** any person requesting **notice** must receive it.
 - Notice must include the **date, time, and place.**
 - The presiding officer has the duty to provide notice.
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■ NOTICE

- Notice must be **reasonable**
 - Written notice is not required
 - Can require new request each FY
 - **IF** Agenda exists – must be made available upon request
 - Agenda should include all items to be discussed
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KOMA

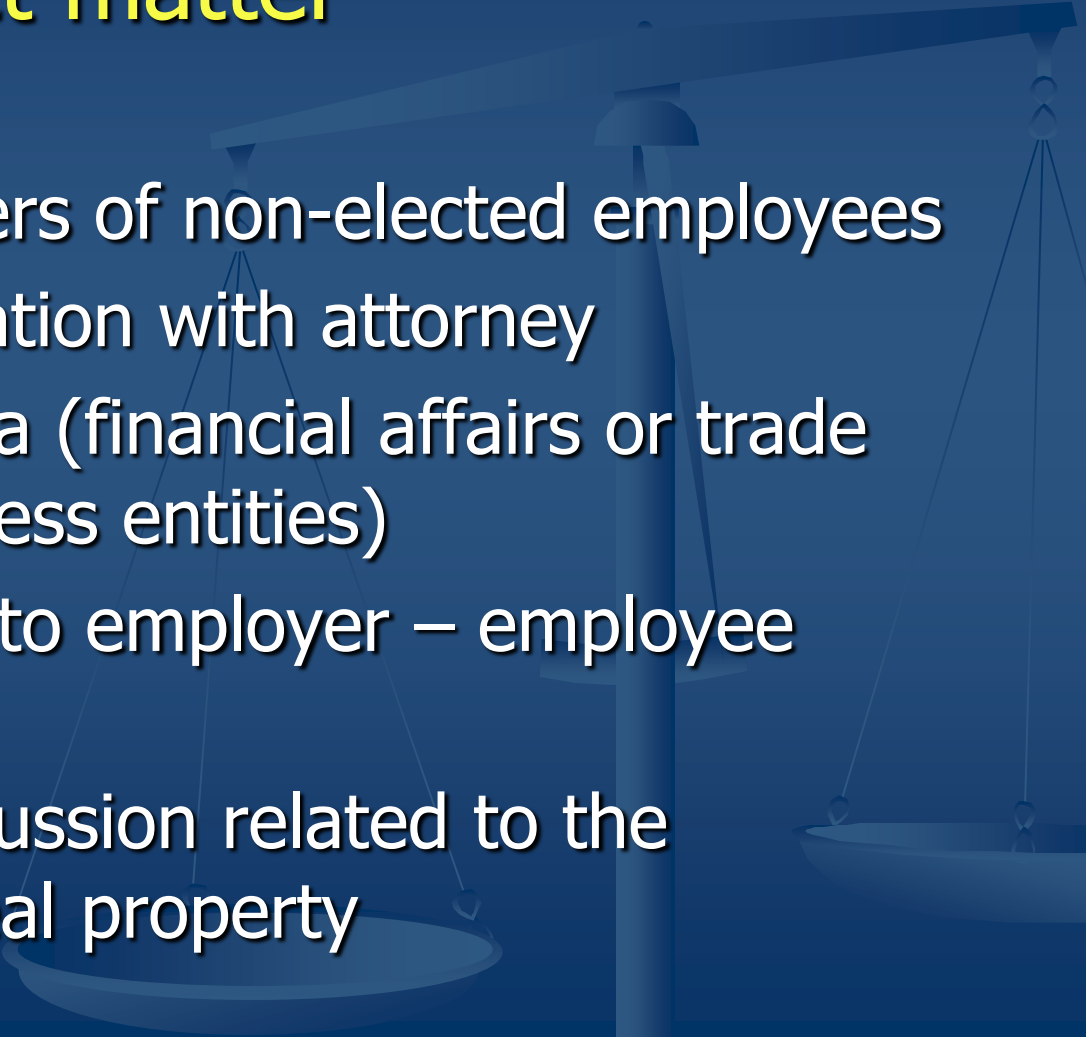
■ EXECUTIVE (CLOSED) SESSIONS

- Convene open meeting
- Formal motion, second, and affirmative vote required to recess
- Return to open meeting to continue business or to adjourn

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- Formal motion MUST include:
 - Justification for closure
 - Explanation of need
 - Subjects for discussion
 - Statutory exceptions
 - Time and place meeting will resume

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- Limited subject matter
 - Examples:
 - Personnel matters of non-elected employees
 - Limited consultation with attorney
 - Confidential data (financial affairs or trade secrets of business entities)
 - Matters related to employer – employee negotiations
 - Preliminary discussion related to the acquisition of real property
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KOMA

- Example of motion:
 - “I move to recess into executive session to discuss confidential data relating to the financial affairs of WWW Corp. in order to protect the privacy rights of that entity; and that we reconvene the meeting at 8:00p.m. in the Council Chamber.”
- No other matters may be discussed other than those stated in the motion.

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- Closed session limitations:
 - No binding action can be taken
 - BUT: Consensus can be achieved
 - No outsiders unless invited to assist members
 - Burden of proof is on the body to show substantial compliance

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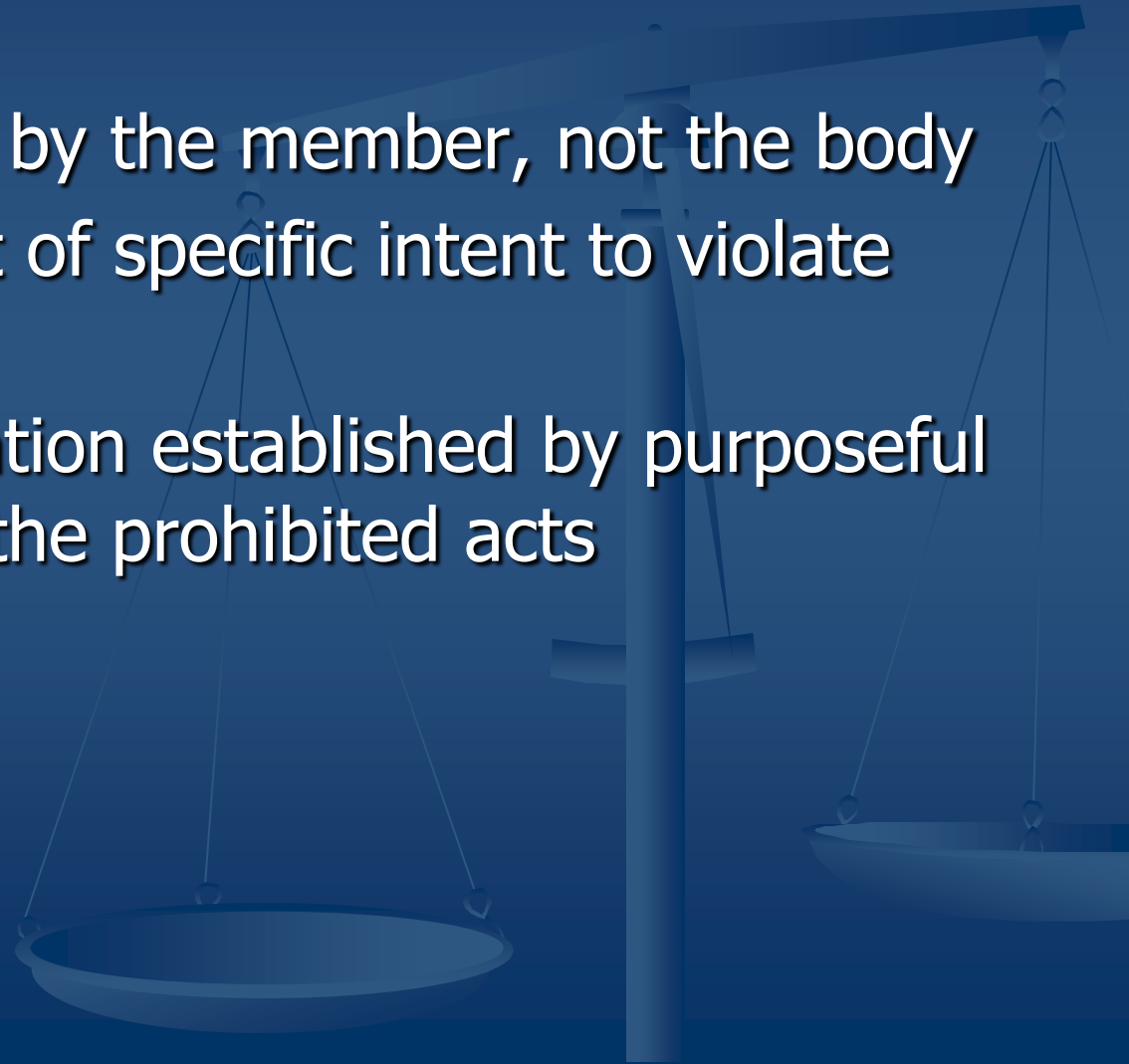
■ Enforcement:

- By Attorney General, County or District Attorney, or by any person
- Private suits may seek injunction, mandamus or other appropriate order
- Court costs may be awarded
 - To plaintiff, if violation established
 - To body, if frivolous suit, in bad faith, without reasonable basis in fact or law

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■ Enforcement:

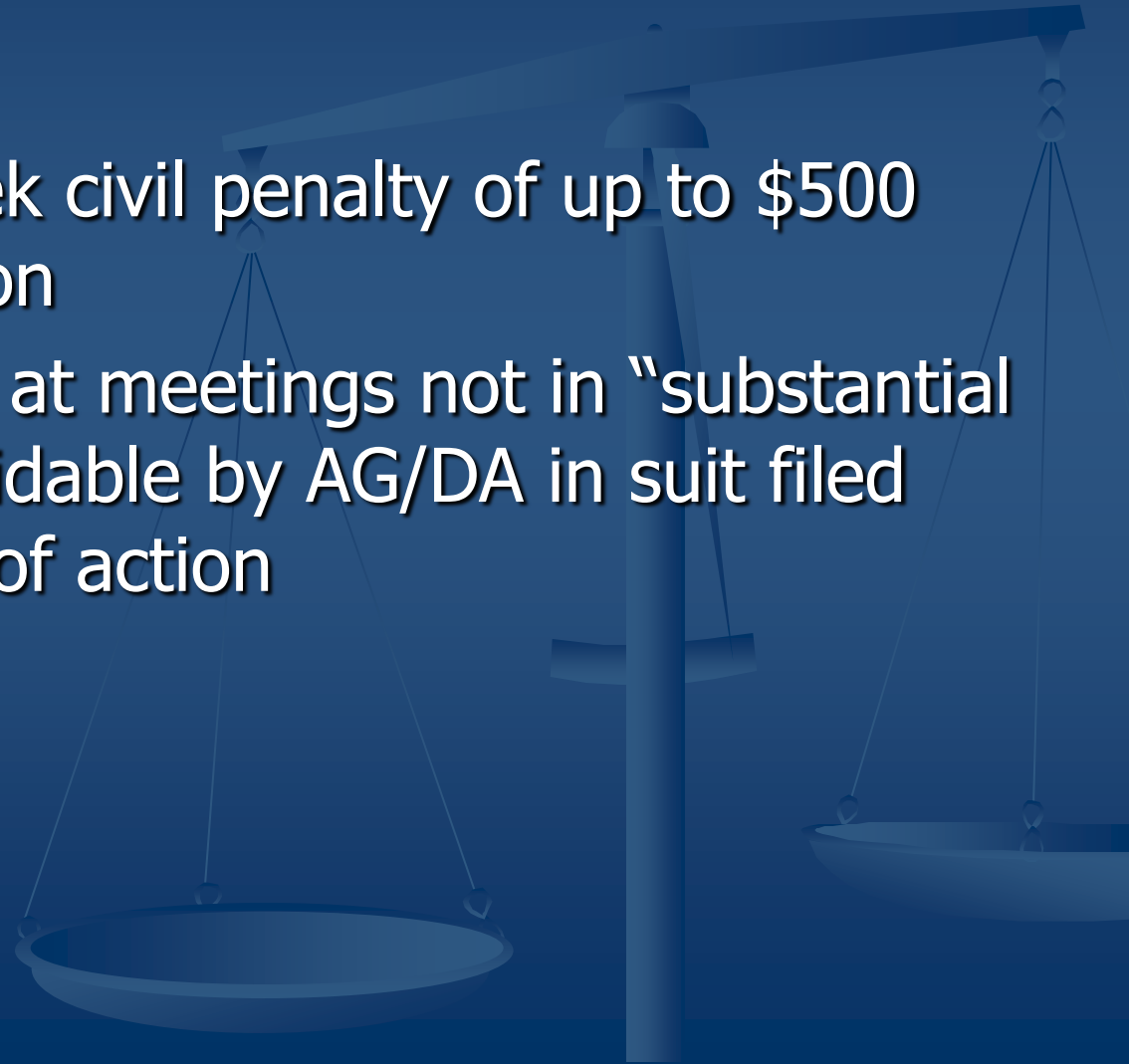
- The violation is by the member, not the body
- No requirement of specific intent to violate the law
- “Knowing” violation established by purposeful commission of the prohibited acts



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■ Penalties:

- AG/DA may seek civil penalty of up to \$500 for each violation
- Binding actions at meetings not in “substantial compliance” voidable by AG/DA in suit filed within 21 days of action



KORA

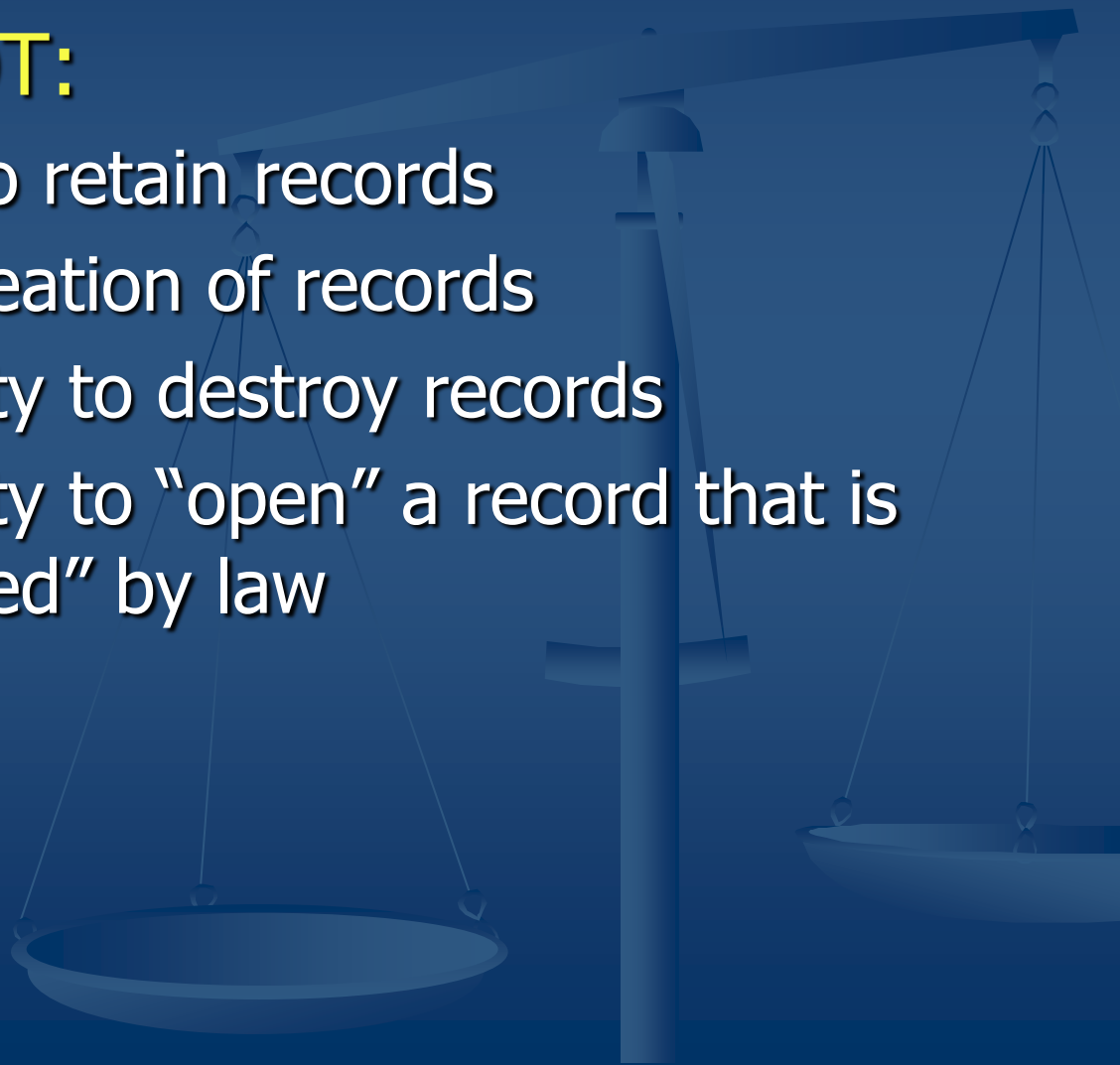
■ KANSAS OPEN RECORDS ACT

- The public's statutory right to:
 - Inspect records of a public agency
 - Copy records of a public agency
- Applies to the state or any political or taxing subdivision, or their officers and agencies much like KOMA
- "It is declared to be the public policy of this state that public records shall be open for inspection by any person unless otherwise provided by this act, and this act shall be **liberally construed and applied** to promote such policy."

KORA

■ KORA DOES NOT:

- Create a duty to retain records
- Mandate the creation of records
- Provide authority to destroy records
- Provide authority to “open” a record that is otherwise “closed” by law



KORA

■ PUBLIC RECORDS

- Recorded information regardless of form
- Made, maintained or kept by a public agency
- DOES NOT INCLUDE:
 - Records owned by private person/entity and not related to publicly funded operations
 - Records made, maintained or kept by legislators or members of governing bodies of political or taxing subdivisions

KORA

- **EXEMPT RECORDS**
- Public access is not mandatory for certain exempt records (currently, 49 exemptions)
- Examples:
 - Personnel records
 - Criminal Investigative records
 - Medical treatment records

KORA

- Examples:
 - Records privileged under the rules of evidence
 - Attorney work product
 - Records containing personal information where disclosure would constitute a “clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy”
 - Engineering and architectural estimates relative to public improvements
 - Sealed bids until a bid accepted or all rejected

KORA

■ SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

- Adopt procedures for public inspection and copying as required by KORA
- Provide suitable facilities for the public to use for inspection
- Appoint a records custodian
- Make available a brochure detailing the rights of the public and responsibilities of the agency re KORA

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■ SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

- Requests are to be handled as soon as possible (Within 3 business days)
- Permit some copying of public records (limited exceptions)
- Prohibit use of public records of lists of names for commercial purposes
- Designate a local freedom of information officer

KORA

■ PUBLIC RIGHT OF ACCESS

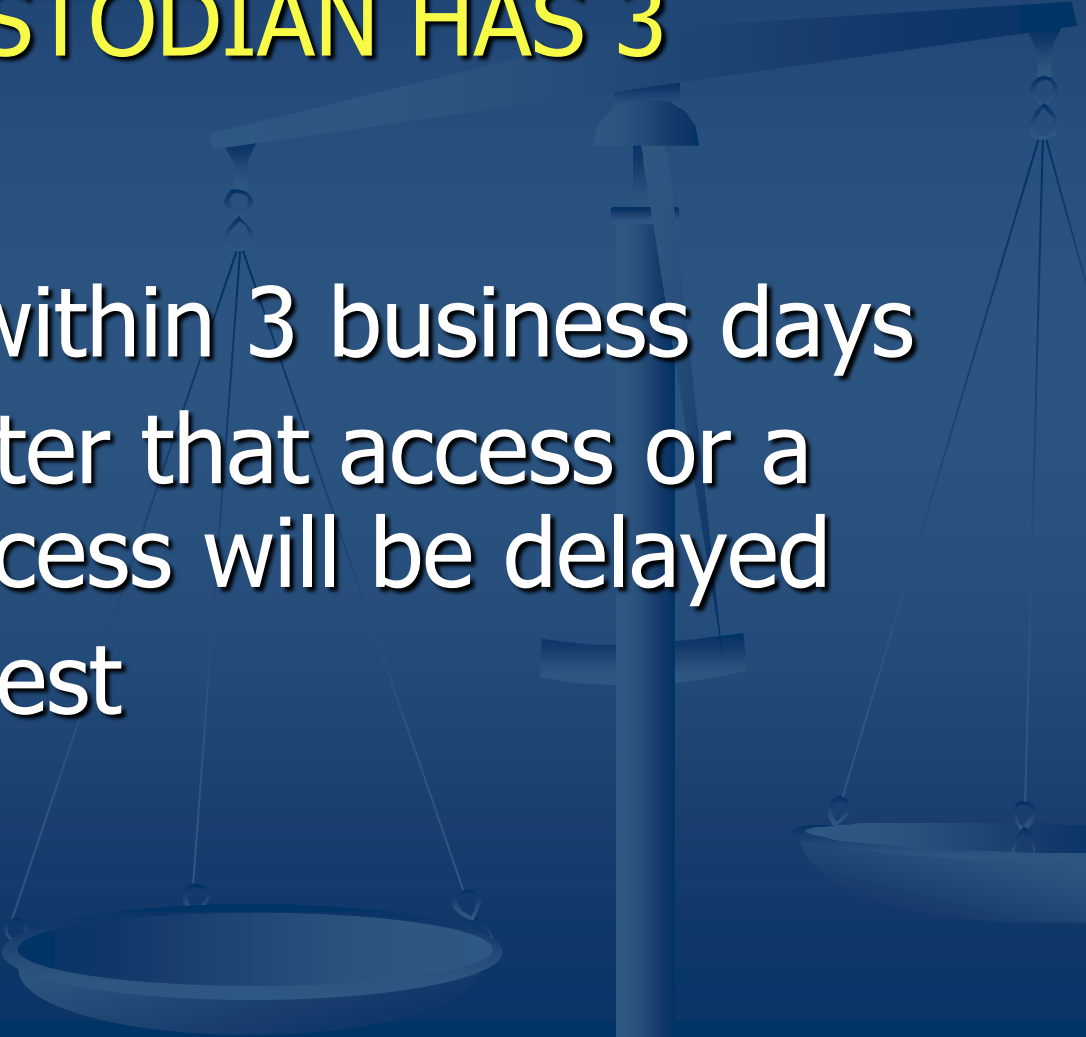
- Access during regular office hours
- Agency may require written requests to establish specific records desired and the requester's name, address
- If access is statutorily limited, may require written certification that information obtained will not be used to sell property or services

KORA

■ PUBLIC RIGHT OF ACCESS

- Agency may require
 - Proof of identity
 - Payment of reasonable costs of copying before fulfilling request
- Agency may NOT
 - Require a specific form to request records
 - Be required to provide copies of audio or visual recordings unless played in a public meeting of the governing body (if played, need not copy if privately copyrighted)

KORA

- RECORD'S CUSTODIAN HAS 3 OPTIONS
 - Grant access within 3 business days
 - Inform requester that access or a decision on access will be delayed
 - Deny the request
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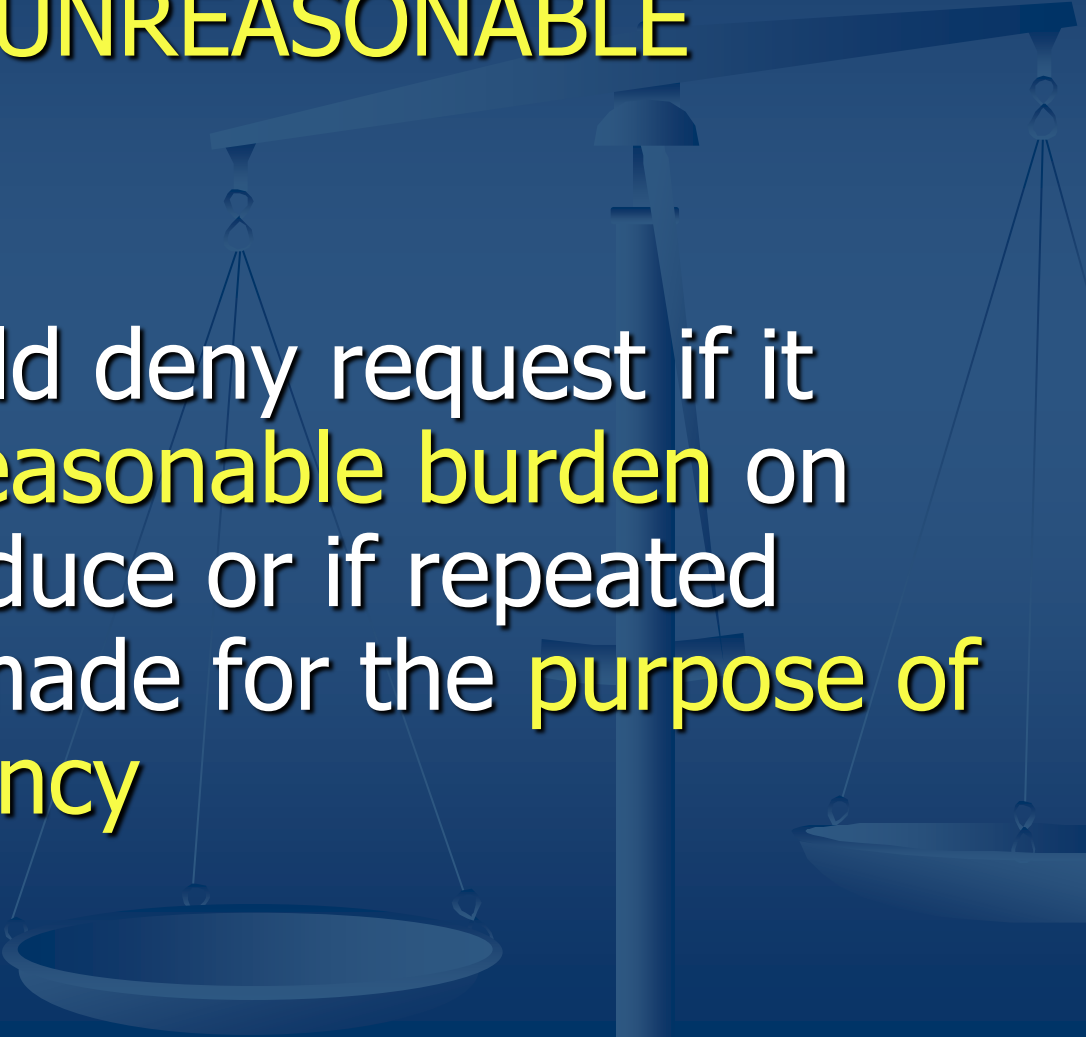
■ DELAYED ACCESS

- Custodian must provide written statement explaining the delay & date of earliest access or decision on access

■ DENIAL OF ACCESS

- Custodian must provide written statement explaining grounds & legal authority for denial within three days

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- DENIAL FOR “UNREASONABLE BURDEN”
 - Custodian could deny request if it places an **unreasonable burden** on agency to produce or if repeated requests are made for the **purpose of disrupting agency**
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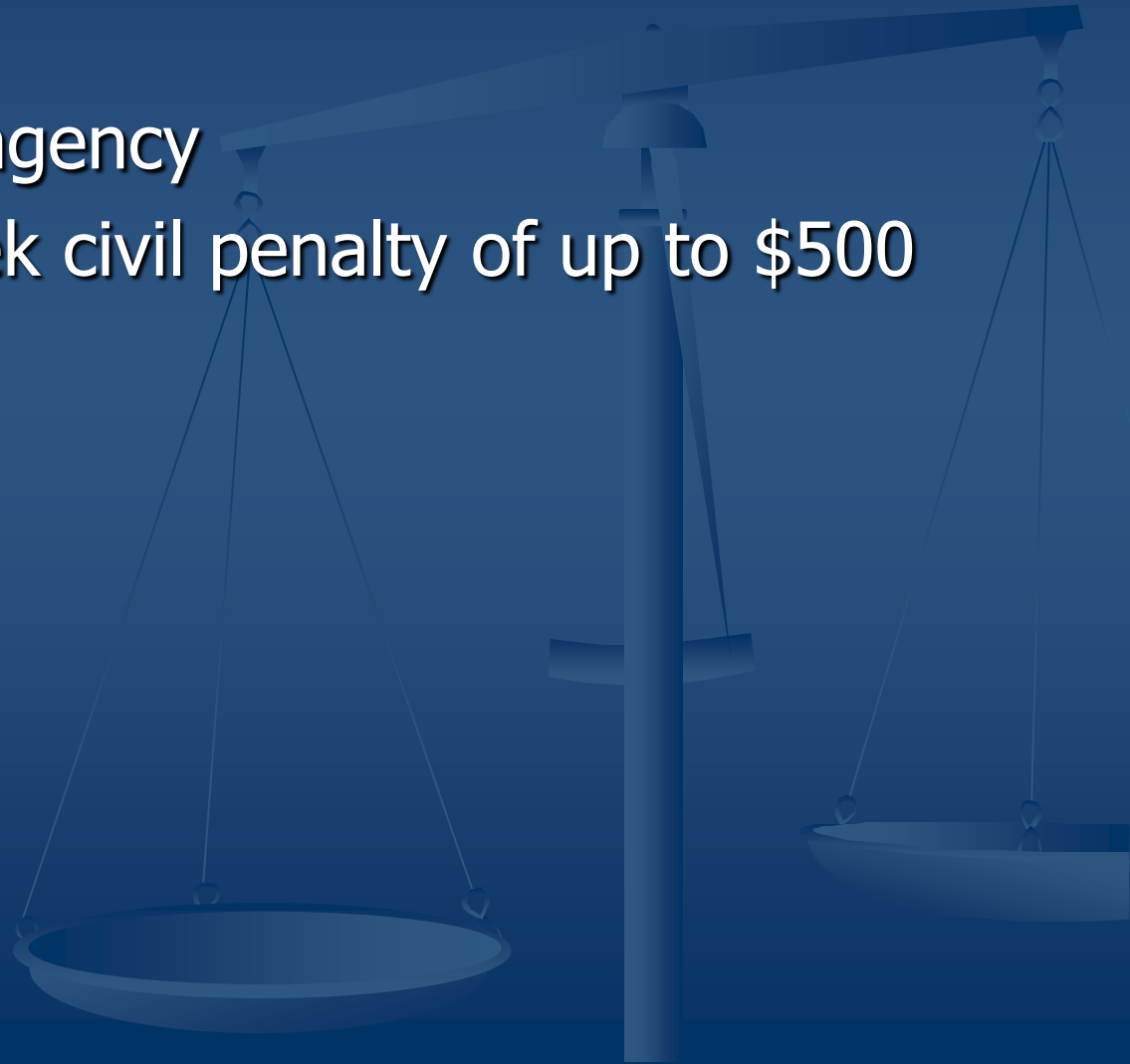
■ Enforcement

- May be enforced by any person, Attorney General, or County or District Attorney
- Relief through injunction, mandamus or other appropriate order
- Costs and attorneys fees can be awarded against agency if denial in **bad faith and without reasonable basis in fact or law**; reverse is also true, i.e. suit brought in bad faith without reasonable basis

KORA

■ Penalties

- Violation is by agency
- AG/DA may seek civil penalty of up to \$500



The End

